

---

## Intoxicated in the classroom: Teachers' experiences of teaching drug addicted learners in KwaZulu-Natal township schools, South Africa

---

Themba Ralph Mkhize and Zamakhosi Shembe  
Department of Educational Foundations  
University of South Africa, RSA  
Corresponding author: [mkhiztr@unisa.ac.za](mailto:mkhiztr@unisa.ac.za)

### ABSTRACT

The number of drug users in Africa is projected to rise in the next decade by as much as 40 per cent, simply because of the growing youth population on the continent (UNODC,2021). Yet relatively very little is known and understood about the plight of teachers who contend with drug-addicted learners in their classrooms. The need for this study was prompted by the traumatic experiences of teachers in these drug-ridden classrooms in the KwaDabeka Township, in the KwaZulu-Natal province. Teachers are threatened, physically harmed, verbally abused, and emotionally and psychologically traumatised by learner who use drugs during class. The saddest part though, is that these teachers suffer in silence. The purpose of this study is to investigate teachers' experiences regarding teaching learners addicted to drugs in KwaZulu-Natal township schools. There is a paucity of research that explores the plight of teachers who conduct lessons in drug-ridden classrooms within the township context. This is a qualitative study located within the Interpretivist paradigm. Six teachers from three high schools in KwaDabeka were selected for the study. Purposeful sampling was utilised to select teachers with experience of teaching drug addicted learners. Interviews were conducted as data-gathering techniques. We used thematic data analysis to analyse data. This study is supported by the Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Critical Emancipatory Theory. Four main findings emerged from the data, which were used to make recommendations to improve teaching and learning in drug affected township schools.

**Keywords:** *Addicted learners, drug addiction, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Critical Emancipatory Research, township school violence*

---

### INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse is a world-wide scourge that has found its way into the classroom. This is confirmed by Canton (2021) in The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Canton (ibid) approximates the number of people using drugs from 226 million users in 2010 to 275 million in the previous year. Research predicts that the number of substance users in Africa may escalate to forty percent as a result of the growing youth population on the continent (UNODC,2021). The World Health Organization (WHO, 2020) states that more than 42 million years of healthy life loss were attributable to drug use in 2017; that is about 1.3% of the global burden of disease. South Africa is not exempted from the scourge of drug

abuse. According to the Mail and Guardian (Hunter, 2021; Mayeza & Bhana; 2021), substance abuse has emerged as a reason for the spike in crimes during the first quarter of 2021. Different scholars agree that drug abuse in South Africa has become a huge problem (Makgoke & Mofokeng, 2020; Mokwena & Sindane, 2020; Mamabolo, 2020). The necessity of this study was prompted by the realisation that when it comes to various problems, including violence created by drug addicted learners in school, many studies tend to focus mainly on the causes of such behaviour (Mahabeer, 2020; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021), and not on the degree to which different forms of disruptions and violence actually affect teachers and non-drug using learners. These studies tend to focus more on intervention strategies rather than on the

plight of the teacher experiencing intimidation and violence caused by drug addicted learners. Furthermore, they do not take into account the “personal cost and suffering” (Fetherston & Lummis, 2012, p. 2; Hunter, 2021) experienced by teachers who are abused by learners, and sometimes by parents. In the midst of all the chaos, the teacher has the monumental task of making it possible for the entire class to obtain maximum benefit out of lessons that are due to them. At the same time, they have to discipline the drug abusers to maintain some kind of normalcy, while keeping in mind that they have to avoid the physical danger that is always a possibility under these circumstances. In South Africa, the term “township” refers to under-developed urban areas that were established for “non-whites” during the apartheid era (Mupira & Ramnarain, 2018).

## **BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM**

In KwaDabeka Township, many young people are caught in the grip of drug abuse. The majority of these youths are teenagers whose school careers are suffering because of the scourge of substance use. The South African National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools is a policy that acknowledges drug use as a major problem in South African schools (RSA, 2002). However, its effectiveness remains elusive and unimplemented. In KwaDabeka, many young people are addicted to whoonga. Whoonga is a highly addictive concoction of cheap heroine, cannabis and other impurities such as rat poison (Hunter, 2021).

Learners add other things to increase its potency by adding one or more of the following household products: rat poison, milk powder, bicarbonate of soda, pool cleaner, or some type of powder found inside plasma television sets (Mamabolo, 2020, p.1).

The Department of Health in KwaZulu-Natal suggests that whoonga use is the most popular drug in this province (National Drug Master Plan, 2019). Whoonga addicted learners cause all sorts of problems in the classroom and within the school premises. These disturbances include late coming, class disruptions, and intimidation of teachers and non-drug using learners. Teachers live in constant fear of the drug-using learners because many a time, they have endured violence of some kind and humiliation at the hands of the drug-addicted learners. Since drug abuse is a national and global phenomenon, the following paragraphs discuss the violence against teachers perpetrated by drug-using learners. In KwaDabeka Township, many teachers live in fear of being attacked by learners within the school premises. This problem is not confined only to KwaDabeka schools, it occurs all over the country as well as the whole world, making for horrid news nationally and internationally. According to Botha and Zwane (2021), and Herrero Romero et al. (2021), violence in schools is “multi-dimensional”, taking on various forms. Among them is the assault of teachers by learners, sometimes right in the middle of lessons and in full view of fellow learners (Botha & Zwane, 2021). The report goes on to mention that now more than ever; learners are willing to adopt physically aggressive strategies to resolve whatever conflict they face.

Nzama and Ajani (2021) observe that South African schools have rapidly and increasingly become arenas of violence. This violence is not only among learners but between teachers and learners, interschool rivalries as well as gang conflict. Teachers and learners have a good reason to fear for their safety on the school premises. This is due to aggression and violence that appears to be the norm nowadays in some schools, caused by the unruly behaviour exhibited by some learners, who are usually under the

influence of drugs (Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). According to Hunter (2021), and Mayeza and Bhana (2021), the culture of school-based violence is increasingly undermining the climate and environment conducive to effective teaching and learning. This means that the precious time that is meant for lesson delivery is spent on trying to solve problems associated with drug addiction and school violence, and therefore, effective teaching and learning suffers as a result (Wolhuter & Van der Walt, 2020).

In the next section we explore the literature on drug abuse in schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with its 17 goals and 169 targets, is considered to be a universal policy agenda that provides a plan of action for people, planet, and prosperity (UN, 2015). South Africa is a signatory of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). UNODC's work on drugs and health is inextricably linked to multiple targets of Sustainable Development Goals including target 3.5, which aims to strengthen the prevention and treatment of substance abuse (UN, 2015).

Acknowledging the problem of substance abuse among in-school youth, the South African National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools was published in 2002, which provides a roadmap to increase the capacity of schools to manage drug abuse in the school environment (Mokwena et al., 2020). Furthermore, the National Drug Management Plan 2019-2024 (NDMP, 2019) in South Africa recognises that the relationship between drug control and human development is complex and requires a coordinated and multi-sectoral approach. Despite the promising international and national policies, there remains a dearth of literature and effective strategies and approaches to assist teachers in drug-ridden schools to cope in their

challenged teaching environments (Mokwena et al., 2020). We argue for the need to understand the experiences of teachers, thus triggering a dialogue about the required intervention strategies that acknowledge the social, economic, and cultural contexts of both learners and teachers when dealing with drug addiction in township schools.

Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019) define substance abuse as a chronic debilitating illness with serious morbidity and mortality, which affects drug users and their families. They also define substance addiction as a compulsive sequence of drug abuse characterised by a loss of control over the use of the substance, and prolonged use, regardless of the considerable substance-related problems and the emergence of a physiological need when withdrawal occurs. The World Drug Report (2018) reveals that surveys on drug abuse conducted among the general population depicts that the degree of drug abuse among young people remains higher than that of older people. South Africa is no exception. The picture regarding drug abuse in South Africa is unsettling. Zinyama (2019), using the UN World Drug Report (2014), maintains that substance dependency statistics indicate that drug consumption (cannabis, cocaine and tik) in South Africa is twice the global average and second to none in Africa. Zinyama (2019) further offers that the average age of drug dependency in South Africa is twelve years and decreasing. South Africa is among the top ten narcotics and alcohol abusers in the world. Tshitangano and Oni (2016) concur with Zinyama (2019) by stating that over 15% of the population in South Africa suffers from a drug problem. Over and above the tremendous emotional and social cost of drug abuse, Walton, Avenant and van Schalkwyk (2016) point out that the annual cost to the South African economy is as much as R130 billion. The implications of substance abuse are enormous and varied. These are *social*

*implications, physical implications and academic implications.*

### ***Social implications***

In the United States (US), 7.4 million people aged 12 years or older reported symptoms of a drug use disorder in 2016 (Kendler et al., 2018). According to Ritchie and Roser (2019), one in five deaths globally is attributed to substance use. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA, 2020) states that the substance abuse annual cost is over \$600 billion annually (NIDA,2020) in the United States. In Kenya, “drug abuse also carries an economic cost since the users become less productive and more dependent with time and the government has to spend a lot of resources in trying to curb the drug menace and provide health care for those already afflicted” (Muhia, 2021, p. 2).

Walton, Avenant and van Schalkwyk (2016), explain that the annual cost of substance abuse to the South African economy is as much as R130 billion. Therefore, we maintain that substance abuse places a huge burden on the state budget, thus limiting critical government social spending. Young people involved in drugs are usually treated as pariahs by the communities they live in, where even the drug abusers' families are normally disliked, and their parents viewed in almost the same light as their drug-using offspring (Shembe, 2013; Botha & Zwane, 2021). Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019) posit that there is a pronounced link between consumption of illegal substances and an increase in the crime rate among drug abusers.

### ***Physical implications***

According to Grelotti et al. (2014), smoked heroin (whoonga) is perceived to be easily accessible and inexpensive, and increasingly prevalent among school-aged youth. Young people experience a lot of pain when they are suffering from withdrawals. They mention stomach

cramps, loss of appetite and many other physical discomforts (Shembe, 2013; Tyree et al., 2020). The National Institute on Drug Abuse (2020) says that when someone stops using a drug, common symptoms include sickness, the urge to use again, and fear. Abdullahi and Sarmast (2019), highlight the fact that drug-abusing youth are also vulnerable to various forms of physical abuse such as beatings and rapes, which result in various physical injuries. Some of these injuries may even be self-inflicted such as cutting, bruising or burns.

In South Africa, whoonga or nyaope addicts can be characterised by their meagre personal cleanliness, sluggish movement, and half-dazed appearance (Mbanjwa, 2014). According to Mabokela and Muswede (2021), Whoonga is extremely addictive, and addicts who want to stop using it have a difficult time doing so.

### ***Academic implication***

Kendler et al. (2018) explain that an increase in drug use and abuse results in poor academic performance in adolescents the United States of America (US). According to Okafor (2019), drug abuse has adverse effects on students' education in different academic institutions globally, and is a major concern in Nigeria because of the effects on the youth and the nation. Abiodun (2021) posits that the earlier young people start to abuse drugs, the greater their chances of becoming addicted to them are, and this impacts on academic focus achievement. Studies in South Africa (Shembe, 2013; Hunter, 2020; Nzama & Ajani, 2021) confirm that drug abusers hardly ever attend school, and this results in them not coping with their schoolwork. In fact, they fail and have to repeat the year in almost every grade, moving to the next grade only because they are condoned (Shembe, 2013; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). Mokwena and Sindane (2020) add that many young learners are dropping out due to alcohol and substance abuse. We

argue that this means drug addicted learners contribute a lot to poor academic results in schools globally and in sub-Saharan Africa (WHO, 2020; UNODC, 2021). Hunter and Morrell (2021), report the disruptive behaviours of South African high school learners who use dangerous weapons to threaten other learners and teachers, or resort to vandalism, theft, and other crimes while under the influence of drugs. In the next section we explore the theoretical framework utilised in this article.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

To achieve the purpose of this study, we decided to integrate the Bronfenbrenner's (1979,2005) Bio-ecological Theory and Critical Emancipatory Research (CER). The discussion focusses specifically on the explanation of theories and their application and relevance to this study.

### **Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Theory**

The study employed Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory. This theory is about the different environments that affect the child directly or indirectly, in a positive or negative way within the family environment in which the child lives. This theory argues that if stakeholders are to succeed in their quest to fight drug use and abuse in schools, they need to include the child's family and community background. As Bronfenbrenner (1979) puts it, "the child is studied in the context of family, which lies in the context of community". Each family or community setting is different, which means that KwaDabeka township learners need to be studied in their specific context in order to identify solutions that will work for their specific context. The Ecological Systems Theory was selected as a way of situating and illuminating the causes of drug abuse amongst young people in South Africa (van Zyl, 2013). This abuse leads to the struggles of teachers trying to conduct typical teaching and learning in an environment that is not conducive to the activity of teaching and learning. The use of Bronfenbrenner's Theory brought to light the importance of the

relationship of various systems in the forming of adolescents' identities and their need to belong (Sedibe & Hendricks, 2020).

Joshi (2018) posits that Bronfenbrenner's belief was that everything that surrounds students in their environment has an effect on them. In agreement with Joshi, Taylor and Gebre (2016) point out that Bronfenbrenner believes that human development occurs through an intricate exchange between an active and evolving human organism and the people and objects in the surrounding environment. The essence of these interchanges (for example, their form, power, and content) that affect the development, may vary according to the traits of the developing person (Taylor & Gebre, 2016). This revelation may assist teachers to better analyse the learners' environment, which may lead to a better understanding of how to handle the situation they find themselves in.

Using Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the World Drug Report (2018) establishes that the route from initiation to harmful drugs among the youth is influenced by different factors, which are usually out of their control. Personal level factors include behavioural and mental health, neurological developments, and gene variations resulting from social influences. The micro level factors include parental and family functioning, schools and peer influences. The macro level factors, which include socio-economic and the physical environment, can leave adolescents vulnerable to substance abuse.

### **Critical Emancipatory Research**

This research is underpinned by Critical Emancipatory Research (CER), which has its foundations in the Critical Theory paradigm. The Critical Theory epistemology in this study suggests that the researcher and the researched are presumed to be connected, with the values of the researcher "impacting the inquiry" (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 110). Historically linked

to Critical theorists from the Frankfurt School, namely Horkheimer, Adorno and Marcuse, Critical Theory refined and tested Marxist underpinnings (Asghar, 2013). Horkheimer (1982, p. 244) states, "critical theory seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them". Critical theory is favoured in this paper because, contrary to traditional theory that investigates and endorses the status quo, critical theory interrogates the status quo and aims for a just and free world, which is what teachers who teach drug-addicted learners in township schools need. CER encompasses the principles of peace, emancipation and equal rights for all (McGregor, 2017). The CER principles of equality, participation, social justice and human emancipation ensure that the marginalised voices of teachers who work in schools with drug addiction, are acknowledged (Mahlomaholo, 2009). Next we discuss the research methodology utilised in this study.

## METHODOLOGY

The main research question that guided this study is the following: "*What are the teachers' experiences of teaching drug addicted learners in KwaZulu-Natal township schools*". To achieve this goal, the qualitative method was selected for the study. The qualitative method can help researchers to access the thoughts and feelings of research participants, which can enable the development of an understanding of the meaning that people ascribe to their experiences (Sutton & Austin, 2015). The researcher opted to adopt the Interpretive paradigm to find common problems facing teachers in drug-ridden classrooms in KwaDabeka. Thanh and Thanh (2015) explain that the Interpretive paradigm allows researchers to view the world through the perceptions and experiences of the participants. Six participants from three high schools in KwaDabeka were selected for the study. Purposeful sampling was the choice for the

study. Interviews were conducted as data-gathering techniques. We used thematic data analysis to identify, analyse, and report patterns (themes) within data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). To ensure rigour, we used reflective journals and member-checking to ensure that what emerged from our interactions with school stakeholders in this study, was not influenced by our own personal interpretations and biases (Guba & Lincoln, 1984).

According to Bless et al. (2006), research ethics assists in avoiding research pitfalls and misuse; it also promotes the accountability of researchers, who need to be guided by, and respect, ethics. Permission to conduct the study was granted by the institution ethical clearance committee in the College of Education. Further approval for conducting the research was obtained from the Department of Basic Education (DBE) in KwaZulu-Natal. The study is informed by ethical principles that include non-maleficence, autonomy of research participants, informed consent, anonymity, and confidentiality (Creswell & Clark, 2019). The findings and discussion of this study are presented in the next section.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, teachers' experiences of teaching drug addicted learners in KwaZulu-Natal township schools are discussed. The experiences discussed under this section are. *Loss of valuable teaching time, Loss of concentration, Teachers' demotivation, and Fear.*

### Loss of valuable time

All participants lamented the fact that the time that is spent dealing with cases of drug abuse, theft, bullying, and disruptions of any kind, takes a big portion out of the time that is meant for effective teaching and learning.

Learners attend classes, not in the good state of mind. Learners who are on drugs are always disruptive. Teachers cannot teach or run the lesson smoothly because learners who use drugs are very aggressive and violent. Drug-addicted learners are always absent from school. They never do their homework. They are very chaotic in the classroom. (Teacher 1)

During lessons, they look at the teacher as if they do not even know him/her. They have this look of uncertainty as if they are trying to understand why they are in class in the first place. (Teacher 3)

We do not have ways and means to recover the lost time. The result is that teachers are always behind schedule with their work. We feel disorganised, and not sure whether to continue with the syllabus or go back to try and patch up the work that was never done or finished due to specific disruptions. (Teacher 2)

Nemati and Matlabi (2017) concur that disruptive behaviour on the part of learners who abuse substances include a lack of concentration, disrespect for school authority, vandalism, physical violence, rejection, theft, graffiti spraying and verbal abuse. These authors argue that these disruptive behaviours contribute to the loss of valuable teaching and learning time. Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005) proposed that individual development and behaviour can be influenced by the ecological environment, which is regarded as a set of interrelated, nested structures. We agree with Msimanga (2017), that CER is critical in the academic space because it enables dialogue among teachers and learners about difficult issues, including the topic of substance abuse.

## Loss of concentration

Concentration is the key to success in any learning and teaching situation. There is no compelling teaching and learning without concentration. However, this is precisely the scenario that faces participants who have drug-using learners in their classes. The loss of concentration according to the participants, occurs for both teachers and learners.

Drug-addicted learners in class seem very lost. During lessons, they look at the teacher as if they do not even know him/her. They have this look of uncertainty as if they are trying to understand why they are in class in the first place. (Teacher 4)

Anything can cause drug addicts to laugh, sometimes hysterically, as if whatever they look at is humorous, or what the teacher is teaching in front of the class is utterly amusing and hilarious. When the teacher asks these learners, what is it that they find so funny, they are usually not able to explain it. Most of the time their standard response is “nothing”. (Teacher 5)

Drug-addicted learners do not concentrate in class when they are high or stoned. They get into all kinds of mischief, including stealing whatever they come across. They sleep during lessons. They are disruptive in classes. They sometimes laugh at nothing during lessons. (Teacher 2)

According to Mokwena and Sindane (2020), controlling substance abuse in school learners has remained a critical challenge in South Africa, as some school premises are infiltrated with various drugs. Mamabolo (2020) posits that one out of three young learners aged between 13

and 18 years, engage in various substance abuse activities within school premises. Loss of concentration, violent behaviour and criminality has become the order of the day in schools with drug-addicted learners (Hlomani-Nyawasha & Meyer-Weitz, 2020). We concur with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) belief that everything that surrounds students in their environment has an effect on them. This is important in creating intervention programmes for addicted learners in township schools.

### Teachers' demotivation

All participants reported that motivation at the present moment, is at its lowest.

As teachers we dread waking up each school day, knowing what awaits us at school in the form of the fearsome [sic] drug addicts who want to take over the school. We find it difficult to look forward to uncertainty. Uncertainty because we are not sure if we will be able to perform our duties as per our work schedules, that is, plan the delivery of lessons, tests, assessments, issuing of projects and homework. (Teacher 4)

Another teacher expressed a sense of demotivation among teaching staff and had this to say:

Teaching and learning depend on the mercy of drug using learners, who decide when to disrupt any class or school activity, whether they attended the lessons or not. (Teacher 6)

One of the most demotivating factors is the reality that virtually nothing stops the drug using learners from proceeding with whatever kind of disturbance they put their mind to, and the teachers feel as if their hands are tied. (Teacher 1)

Nzama and Ajani (2021) aver that despite several interventions that have been undertaken to fight the scourge of substance abuse among the youths, particularly among learners, there has been a significant increase in substance abuse in schools. We argue in this study that this situation has demotivated many teachers who are constantly interrupted and threatened by violent addicted learners. CER is relevant for couching this article because it provides a theoretical basis for collaborative planning and sharing strategies that will enhance the culture of teaching and learning in township schools (Dube & Hlalele, 2018). CER in this study further questions why the DBE has provided no support for teachers who teach learners in drug-ridden schools.

### Fear

Most participants mentioned fear as one of the crippling factors with regard to the execution of effective teaching and learning. The violence witnessed by both teachers and learners within the school premises seemed to instil much fear, with good reason. One participant commented on the situation of violence in schools as follows:

Learners who use drugs bully teachers and fellow learners. They misbehave in assorted ways and never take the teacher's instructions. They use a lot of vulgar language, which negatively affects other learners. These learners always get poor academic results, which contributes to the high failure rate in school. They steal other learners' belongings such as bags, money and even pens. What is also scary is that they bring dangerous weapons to school. (Teacher 3)

Other participants in the study highlighted fear caused by violence and threats from drug-addicted learners and said:

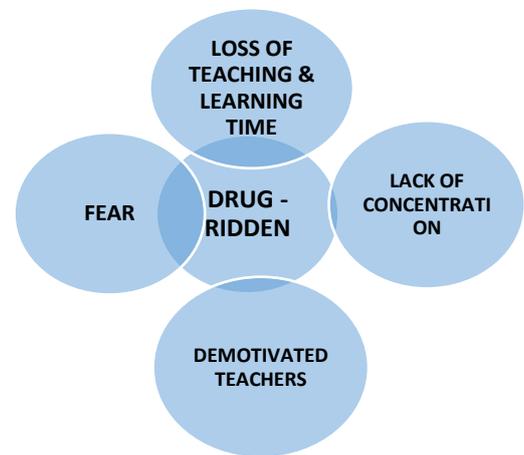
I have witnessed serious fights where learners used different types of dangerous weapons. I once witnessed an incident where a learner pulled a knife with the intention of stabbing a fellow learner. The prospective victim jumped through the window and ran away. (Teacher 4)

Learners who are using drugs are disruptive and violent. They have no respect for teachers as well as fellow learners. They do not want to participate in the learning activities. They are mostly absent from school. When they do appear in [sic] the school premises, they do not attend classes. They are seen loitering up and down the school verandas and hiding in the toilets. In the toilet, they wait for younger learners so that they can bully them into parting with whatever possessions they have, especially the tuck money. Learners are terrified of drug users because they carry all sorts of dangerous weapons. (Teacher 1)

Mokwena and Sindane (2020) posit that many young learners are dropping out of school due to alcohol and substance abuse. Violence, fighting and crime is on the increase in schools, with physical attacks on learners and teachers by learners under substance influence (Mokwena et al., 2020; Nzama & Ajani, 2021). Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, and the World Drug Report (2018), established an increase in drug use and abuse results in poor academic performance in adolescents that the route from initiation to harmful drugs among the youth is influenced by different factors that are usually out of their control. We argue that personal factors, micro, and macro factors should be taken into consideration when the DBE and teachers address the problem of addictive learners in township schools

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Horkheimer (1982, p. 244) states, "critical theory seeks human emancipation to liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them". Therefore, CER principles of social justice, equality and human emancipation in this study argue for the safety and human rights of teachers in drug addicted township schools, and schools free of violence, physical attacks and crime (Mahlomaholo, 2010; Dube & Hlalele, 2018).

The diagramme below (*Figure 1*) presents a summary of our findings and discussion under this section.



**FIGURE 1: Experiences of teachers in drug-ridden township schools**

## CONCLUSION

Our research is a qualitative study conducted in three schools within the township context. Thus, our findings cannot be extended to other schools. However, we argue that the intention of this study was not to generalise its findings but, rather, to understand a practical case that can be used to encourage discourse about the experiences of teachers in drug-ridden township schools. It is also meant to trigger intervention strategies to curb and cope with this challenge. In response to the research question formulated to guide this research, and based on our findings, we conclude that:

First, there is a need to challenge the false consciousness that claims that learners are the only people within the school system that are impacted by substance abuse and school violence inflicted by addicted learners (Asghar, 2013). We argue that educators are also highly affected by substance abuse in township schools (Mabokela & Muswede, 2021; Sedibe & Hendricks, 2021). For example, in 2017, a deputy principal was shot dead at Edalinceba Primary School in Nigel when teaching and learning was interrupted (Magwedze, 2017); the killing happened on the school premises and it traumatised both learners and teachers.

Second, the social-ecological system theory posits that learners can be empowered with knowledge and skills that will enable them not to surrender to pressures from their peers or family to engage in substance abuse (Bronfenbrenner's Theory, 1979, 2005). We recommend that the DBE should encourage workshops and motivational talks about substance abuse and engage NGOs to assist schools. Thus, "the involvement of all the stakeholders in curbing substance abuse by learners will help the education system in South Africa to address substance abuse in schools" (Nzama & Ajani, 2021).

Third, the DBE should allocate experienced school counsellors who visit regularly to monitor substance abuse among learners, and also provide support to educators. However, we caution that schools and educators should not rely heavily on government for support in dealing and coping with substance abuse.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

First, we recommend that schools and educators in townships need to speak with one voice and start mobilising resources (Mkhize 2018; Mkhize & Davids, 2021) aimed at advancing safety and security in their schools and creating drug free learning environments.

Second, the increasing prevalence of substance abuse in township schools demand the application of available policies that guide interventions to combat substance abuse, and therefore, enable policy reviews and amendments to improve interventions. We acknowledge the existence of the National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools in South Africa (2002), however, its effective implementation in schools remain elusive. Therefore, we recommend policy reviews and amendments on substance abuse to improve interventions that are not only focussed on learners, but also acknowledge the existence of teachers within the social-ecological system.

## FUNDING STATEMENT

We declare that this research was not funded but formed part of authors employment at the Department of Educational Foundations, University of South Africa, Pretoria.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this study.

## REFERENCES

- Abiodun, S. (2021). Social Impact of Drug Abuse of Tertiary Students in Nigeria. *Journal homepage: www. ijrpr. com ISSN, 2582, 7421.*  
<https://www.ijrpr.com/uploads/V2ISSUE7/IJRPR718.pdf>
- ABDULLAHI, A. M., & SARMAST, S. T. (2019). *Substance Abuse: A Literature Review of the Implications and Solutions.*
- Asghar, J. (2013). Critical paradigm: A preamble for novice researchers. *Life Sciences, 10(4)*, 3121-3127.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development:*

- Experiments by nature and design.* Harvard university press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1994). Ecological models of human development. *Readings on the development of children*, 2(1), 37-43.
- Bless, C., Higson-Smith, C., & Kagee, A. (2006). *Fundamentals of social research methods: An African perspective.* Cape Town: Juta.
- Botha, R. N., & Zwane, R. P. (2021). Strategies to Prevent Learner-on-Educator Violence in South African Schools. *International Journal of Learning, Teaching and Educational Research*, 20(9).  
<https://doi.org/10.26803/ijlter.20.9.1>
- Canton. H (2021). United Nations office of Drugs and Crime –UNODC In the Europa Director of International organisations 2021(pp.240-244)
- Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2017) Thematic analysis. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 12(3), 297-298.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17439760.2016.1262613>
- Creswell, J. W., & Clark, P. (2019). VL (2007). Designing and conducting mixed methods research. In *Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage IOP Conf. Series: Earth and Environmental Science* (385), 012039.
- DBE (Department of Basic Education) (2013) National strategy for the prevention and management of alcohol and drug use amongst learners in schools. Pretoria: DBE
- Dube, B., & Hlalele, D. (2018). Engaging critical emancipatory research as an alternative to mitigate school violence in South Africa. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 7(2), 74-86.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2018/v7i2a5>
- Fetherston, T., & Lummis, G. (2012). Why Western Australian secondary teachers resign. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(4), 1-20.  
<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2012v37n4.1>
- Grelotti, D. J., Closson, E. F., Smit, J. A., Mabude, Z., Matthews, L. T., Safren, S. A., & Mimiaga, M. J. (2014). Whoonga: Potential recreational use of HIV antiretroviral medication in South Africa. *AIDS and Behavior*, 18(3), 511–518.  
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10461-013-0575-0>.
- Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). Competing paradigms in qualitative research. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research*, 105-117. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Herrero Romero, R., Hall, J., Cluver, L., Meinck, F., & Hinde, E. (2021). How does exposure to violence affect school delay and academic motivation for adolescents living in socioeconomically disadvantaged communities in South Africa? *Journal of interpersonal violence*, 36(7-8), NP3661-NP3694.
- Hlomani-Nyawasha, T. J., Meyer-Weitz, A., & Egbe, C. O. (2020). Factors influencing alcohol use among female in-school adolescents in the Western Cape,

- South Africa. *South African Journal of Psychology*, 50(4), 574-586.
- Horkheimer, M. (1982). Egoism and the freedom movement: On the anthropology of the bourgeois era. *Telos*, 1982(54), 10-60.
- Hunter, M. (2020). Heroin hustles: Drugs and the laboring poor in South Africa. *Social Science & Medicine*, 265, 113329. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2020.113329>
- Hunter, M. (2021). The rise of Xanax in South African schools: Toward a framework for connecting drugs and education. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 90, 103078. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.103078>
- Hunter, M., & Morrell, R. (2021). Corporal punishment and gender equality: regimes of care and rights in South African schools. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1-14.
- Kendler, K. S., Ohlsson, H., Fagan, A. A., Lichtenstein, P., Sundquist, J., & Sundquist, K. (2018). Academic achievement and drug abuse risk assessed using instrumental variable analysis and co-relative designs. *JAMA psychiatry*, 75(11), 1182-1188. [10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2018.2337](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamapsychiatry.2018.2337)
- Mabokela, K., & Muswede, T. (2021). Framing Social Deviance: A Comparative Analysis of South African Newspapers' Representation of Drug Use and Abuse Among the Youth. *Gender and Behaviour*, 19(1), 17116-17130. [https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-genbeh\\_v19\\_n1\\_a4](https://hdl.handle.net/10520/ejc-genbeh_v19_n1_a4)
- McGregor, S. L. (2017). *Understanding and evaluating research: A critical guide*. Sage Publications.
- Magwedze, H. (2017, September 28). Violence in South African schools has reached a critical point. EWN, Eyewitness News. <http://ewn.co.za/2017/09/28/violence-in-sa-schools-has-reached-a-critical-point>
- Makgoke, S., & Mofokeng, J. T. (2020). Strategies for policing alcohol and illicit substance abuse amongst learners of selected secondary schools within the City of Tshwane Metropolitan Municipality. *Acta Criminologica: African Journal of Criminology & Victimology*, 33(1), 91-114.
- Mahabeer, P. (2020). Novice teachers' beliefs and fears on bullying in schools in South Africa. *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship= Koers: Bulletin vir Christelike Wetenskap*, 85(1), 1-15. <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-4576-690X>
- Mahlomaholo, S. (2009). Critical emancipatory research and academic identity. *Africa Education Review*, 6(2), 224-237.
- Mamabolo, P. R. (2020). Prevalence of substance abuse among young school learners: A threat to social stability. *Gender & Behaviour*, 18(3), 16369-16376.
- Mayeza, E., Bhana, D., & Mulqueeny, D. (2021). Normalising violence? Girls and sexuality in a South African high school. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09589236.2021.1881460>

- Mbanjwa, X. (2014). Welcome to nyaope street. City Press, 7 September. [sociology/article/download/39/33](#)
- Mokwena, K., & Sindane, P. (2020). Cigarette smoking and alcohol intake among high school learners in Pretoria, South Africa. *Psychology and Education Journal*, 57(7), 531-536.
- Mokwena, A. V., Mokwena, K., van der Heever, H., & Mokgatle, M. (2020). The National Policy of Drug Abuse Management in Schools in South Africa: Unknown and Unimplemented. *Journal of Drug and Alcohol Research*, 9(5), 1-5.
- Mkhize, T. R. (2018). *Resource mobilisation for the sustainability of schools within rural context: Voices of school stakeholders at UMzimkhulu circuit in Harry Gwala District Municipality*. [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of KwaZulu-Natal.
- Mkhize, T. R. & Davids, M. N. (2021). Towards a Digital Resource Mobilisation Approach for Digital Inclusion During COVID-19 and Beyond: A Case of a Township School in South Africa. *Educational Research for Social Change*, 10 (2), 18-32. <http://dx.doi.org/10.17159/2221-4070/2021/v10i2a2>
- Muhia, D. (2021). Impact of Peer Influence on Substance Abuse among Students in Public Day Secondary Schools in Thika Sub-County, Kiambu County. *Journal of Sociology, Psychology and Religious*, 1(1), 1-18. <https://edinburgjournals.org/journals/index.php/journal-of->
- Mupira, P., & Ramnarain, U. (2018). The effect of inquiry-based learning on the achievement goal-orientation of Grade 10 physical sciences learners at township schools in South Africa. *Journal of Research in Science Teaching*, 55(6), 810-825. <https://doi.org/10.1002/tea.21440>
- Msimanga, M. R. (2017). Teach and assess: A strategy for effective teaching and learning in economic and management sciences (Unpublished doctoral thesis). University of the Free State, South Africa.
- National Institute on Drug Abuse. (2020). Genetics and Epigenetics of Addiction Drug facts. <https://www.drugabuse.gov/publications/drugfacts/genetics-epigenetics-addiction>
- National Drug Master Plan. 2019-2024. Department of Social Development. Republic of South Africa: Central Drug Authority.
- Nemati, Z., & Matlabi, H. (2017). Assessing behavioural patterns of Internet addiction and drug abuse among high school students. *Psychology research and behaviour management*, 10, 39. Nevid, J. (2013). An introduction to psychology (4th ed.). Boston, MA: Cengage Learning. <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S123224>
- Nzama, M. V., & Ajani, O. A. (2021). Substance Abuse among High School Learners in South Africa: A Case Study of Promoting Factors. *African Journal of Development Studies (formerly*

- AFFRIKA Journal of Politics, Economics and Society*, 2021(si1), 219-242. <https://journals.co.za/doi/ab/10.10520/ejc-aa-affrika1-v2021-nsi1-a12>
- Okafor, P. (2019). Causes and Consequences of Drug Abuse among Youth in Kwara State, Nigeria. *Canadian Journal of Family and Youth / Le Journal Canadien de Famille et de la Jeunesse*. <http://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index/php/cjfy>
- Ritchie, H., & Roser, M. (2019). Drug use. *Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/drug-use>
- Sedibe, M., & Hendricks, N. G. P. (2021). Drug Abuse Amongst Adolescent Learners in Townships. *Interchange*, 52(1), 17-39. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10780-020-09407-z>
- Shembe, Z. T. (2013). The effects of whoonga on the learning of affected youth in Kwa-Dabeka township. *University of South Africa*.
- Taylor, R. D., & Gebre, A. (2016). Teacher–student relationships and personalized learning: Implications of person and contextual variables. *Handbook on personalized learning for states, districts, and schools*, 205-220.
- Thanh, N. C., & Thanh, T. T. (2015). The interconnection between interpretivist paradigm and qualitative methods in education. *American journal of educational science*, 1(2), 24-27.
- Tshitangano, T. G., & Oni, T. H. (2016). Substance use amongst secondary school students in a rural setting in South Africa: Prevalence and possible contributing factors. *African journal of primary health care & family medicine*, 8(2), e1–e6. <https://doi.org/10.4102/phcfm.v8i2.934>
- Tyree, G. A., Mosery, N., Closson, E. F., Mabude, Z., du Toit, C., Bangsberg, D. R., & Grelotti, D. J. (2020). Trajectories of initiation for the heroin-based drug whoonga—qualitative evidence from South Africa. *International Journal of Drug Policy*, 82, [10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102799](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.drugpo.2020.102799)
- United Nations. (2015). *Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development*. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf>
- United Nations. (2019). World drug report 2018. *United Nations publication*.
- Van Zyl, A.E. (2013) Drug use amongst South African Youths: Reasons and Solutions. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*. 4 (4), 2039-934
- Walton, K. L., Avenant, J., & Van Schalkwyk, I. (2016). Educators' experiences of their relationships with adolescents involved in drug use. *South African Journal of Education*, 36(3). <http://www.scielo.org.za/pdf/saje/v36n3/02.pdf>
- Wolhuter, C. C., & Van der Walt, J. L. (2020). Indiscipline in South African schools: the

parental/community  
perspective. *Koers: Bulletin for  
Christian Scholarship= Koers:  
Bulletin vir Christelike  
Wetenskap*, 85(1), 1-11  
[http://dx.doi.org/10.19108/koers.  
.85.1.2436](http://dx.doi.org/10.19108/koers.85.1.2436)

World Health Organization (2020)  
.Working for global access  
equitable access to COVID-  
19Vaccines  
[https://www.who.int/initiatives/  
act-accelerator/covax](https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/covax)